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A Nuclear Iran: Does This Change Everything?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

**Signature: _____
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Abstract

Despite the relentless use of diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of power, it appears Iran is determined to enter the nuclear club as soon as possible. Iran has the motive, will, and knowhow to build and deliver a nuclear weapon. Its current intransigence in the face of international pressure seems to be aimed at giving Iran the one element it still needs, time. Engaging with the military instrument of power to prevent Iran from achieving its objective is highly problematic in the current national and international environment. It may be tempting to ignore the issue in favor of believing non-kinetic means will ultimately save CENTCOM from facing the reality of a nuclear-armed Iran, or that a quick, clean military strike can set significantly set back their timeline. Unfortunately, this approach serves only to place the Combatant Commander in the reaction mode should Iran continue on its current course. This paper analyzes the likelihood of Iranian possession of nuclear weapons capability and the means to deliver them in the near future. It then looks at the implications of this new reality in the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR). Finally, it provides recommended actions to ensure preparedness for this probable reality. Through deterrence enhanced by skillful planning, CENTCOM can ensure this wicked problem is only a new planning factor rather than an event that “changes everything” in a region of vital national interest.

INTRODUCTION

The United States and other concerned nations around the world have been working individually and through the United Nations to convince the government of Iran to comply with its self-imposed obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) signed in 1968 and ratified in 1970.¹ As a signatory to this treaty, Iran is required to permit the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor its declared nuclear activities. Despite the relentless use of diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of power by other nations to pressure Iran into meeting its obligations, it appears they are determined to thwart IAEA efforts to monitor their nuclear activities and to enter the world's nuclear club as soon as possible. Many concerned nations have emphatically and repeatedly declared that a nuclear armed Iran is unacceptable, yet as the months and years roll on they have been unable to affect any change in the course of this determined government. While this is certainly not the time to give up the use of these instruments of power in this effort, it is becoming increasingly clear that prudence dictates that Central Command (CENTCOM) begin asking themselves the "so what" question with regard to a nuclear armed Iran in the middle of their area of responsibility (AOR). Does having an unfriendly nuclear armed Islamic nation in the Middle East really change everything as the dramatic rhetoric seems to indicate? If CENTCOM moves the discussion beyond a denial of the problem and begins to accept this probable situation as a planning factor, they can prepare to best ensure that the United States' vital interests in the Middle East and those of U.S. friends and allies are preserved in the future.

This paper discusses this probable, near-term reality in the CENTCOM AOR: Iran in possession of nuclear weapons capability and the means to deliver them. Additionally, it

addresses what CENTCOM should do to prepare for this eventuality. A summary of the current United States policy regarding Iran's pursuit of nuclear arms is provided by way of background. A review of the success record of non-kinetic instruments in deterring Iran's ambitions leads one to conclude that the more "dovish" assertion that these instruments will affect a change in the near future is, perhaps, a bit naïve. A review of information uncovered in recent years and Iran's unwillingness to address the resulting concerns of the IAEA, coupled with an analysis of their possible motives for pursuing nuclear weapons, leaves little doubt regarding their ultimate objective. For "hawks," the use of the military instrument of power may appear to provide the answer to this conundrum. However, careful consideration of the current state of affairs in the world and in the CENTCOM AOR along with an analysis of the plausibility of military attacks achieving the desired end state reveals that counting on this approach to solve the problem may be equally naïve. This leads to a single, probable outcome in the future: an unfriendly, nuclear weapons equipped state in the CENTCOM AOR. In response to this outcome it becomes vital to answer the following questions: can a nuclear armed Iran be deterred from employing these weapons, and what are the operational considerations for the geographic combatant commander? The paper will conclude with a series of recommendations for the CENTCOM staff as they plan to ensure continued U.S. ability to exert strategic influence in pursuit of national interests in their AOR.

BACKGROUND

The United States continues to articulate the policy that a nuclear weapons equipped Iran is an unacceptable end state. In discussing U.S. policy regarding Iran during a speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in October, 2007, Vice President Cheney made the administration's position crystal clear saying "The United States joins other nations in

sending a clear message: We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon.”² President Bush very recently reiterated this position during a joint appearance with Italy’s Prime Minister stating “we agreed that Iran must not be allowed to have a nuclear weapon.”³ The House of Representatives introduced and Congress passed a concurrent resolution in May, 2008 declaring that “preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability through all appropriate economic, political, and diplomatic means, is vital to the national security interests of the United States and must be dealt with urgently.”⁴ Notably absent from this resolution was any notion that the military instrument of power should be used in pursuit of this vital interest. While not ruling out military action the President has, to this point, continued to rely on the other instruments of power to address the problem. The United States is currently lobbying for passage of a new UN Security Council Resolution imposing economic sanctions in the event of continued non-compliance by Iran.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

If adopted, this United Nations Security Council Resolution will represent the fourth round of diplomatic pressure followed by economic sanctions and the second this year. The resolution currently being pursued would impose harsher economic measures than the previous three but has been met with reluctance, especially on the part of Russia. This resistance is due in part to their economic ties to Iran and has been made worse by cooling U.S. relations over their recent involvement in neighboring Georgia. In addition to the diplomatic and economic “stick” approach, the permanent members of the UN Security Council have attempted to garner a freeze of Iran’s pursuit and their entry into negotiations using the “carrot” of economic incentives. All of these actions have been well publicized in an effort to apply the informational instrument of national power by alerting the world to the threat Iran poses to peace and security in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, despite these varied approaches to the use of power short of military engagement, Iran seems to wear the label of “intransigent” as a badge of honor before its population and the Islamic world. In a statement released following a meeting with his Syrian counterpart earlier this year, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defiantly stated “In whatever negotiation we take part, it is unequivocally with the view to the realization of Iran’s nuclear right, and the Iranian nation would not retreat one iota from its rights.”⁵ Beyond mere words, since taking office Ahmadinejad has systematically closed avenues of IAEA oversight put in place by his predecessor.⁶ Nearing the end of his term as the Director General of the IAEA, Dr. Mohamed El Baradei issued a concerned report to the Board of Governors. In it he expressed frustration over Iran’s lack of cooperation in providing the access required to carry out IAEA functions and in answering key questions related to its nuclear program. In his summary, El Baradei states “The Agency, regrettably, has not been able to make any substantive progress on the alleged studies and other associated key remaining issues which remain of serious concern. Unless Iran provides [such] transparency… the Agency will not be able to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran.”⁷

Iran’s response to diplomatic, economic, and information efforts does not leave much room for optimism that these instruments of power will affect the change of heart and behavior desired. A report sponsored by the Bipartisan Policy Center and co-chaired by Senators Daniel Coats and Charles Robb bluntly stated “The current diplomatic approach has not succeeded,” indicating that Iran’s continued practice of crossing the lines laid down by the international community has eroded both Iranian credibility and that of the U.S.⁸ This is not to say the United States should abandon the continued employment of leverage using

these tools. On the contrary concerned nations must continue and, in fact, should redouble their efforts to broaden support for these initiatives among other nations (especially Russia) and then rapidly move toward the maximum pressure these instruments of power permit. This effort represents the best hope for a peaceful solution that achieves the United States' current articulated desired end state of a non-nuclear Iran.

In their defiance, Iran has repeatedly claimed their pursuit of nuclear capability is peaceful. They indicate their desire for domestic nuclear power in order to reduce internal consumption of oil, instead gaining revenue through the sale of this oil on the world market. These Iranian claims that their pursuit is purely peaceful ring hollow in light of the veil of secrecy they meticulously maintain with stalling tactics and legalistic maneuvering in response to UN requests for access, clarification, and information. The Bipartisan Policy Center report shares this sentiment stating “Despite Tehran’s protestations, we do not believe its program is inherently peaceful in nature” and going on to comment on Iran’s “long record of cheating and deception.”⁹ It is also difficult to justify the seemingly urgent need for enrichment of reactor fuel within Iran because by agreement the Russian built reactor at Bushehr will be supplied with fuel for ten years from its completion.¹⁰ The information requested by the IAEA is, in and of itself, telling with regard to Iran’s true nuclear intentions. The IAEA’s concerns surround an alleged green salt project to produce uranium hexafluoride used to enrich uranium in a centrifuge cascade system, documents concerning the machining of uranium hemispheres which have no purpose other than for a nuclear weapon,¹¹ research with the precision shape charges essential to the creation of an implosion-type nuclear weapon and development of a reentry vehicle.¹²

In parallel to its pursuit of nuclear weapons, Iran has been steadily and, more recently, very publicly developing a ballistic missile capability as a means to deliver this payload when it is ready. Iran's ballistic missile program was initially based on Scud missile variations purchased from North Korea in the late 1980s. Based on these initial deliveries, Iran was able to reverse engineer an indigenous capability to produce its own missiles. The single stage Shahab-3 missile was entirely developed and produced inside Iran although based on North Korea's Nodong missile design.¹³ Recent modifications to the Shahab-3 have extended the range of this missile to 2000 kilometers.¹⁴ More worrisome, as mentioned in Dr. El Baradei's recent report, Iran has developed and test flown a larger payload fairing capable of housing a nuclear warhead.¹⁵ It would appear Iran has settled on the Shahab-3 as the vehicle of choice for its anticipated new capability. The frequency and salvo launch nature of recent missile tests appear to be intended not only to provide reliability and accuracy data for the user but to ensure international awareness of the Iranian capability (Figure 1). This purpose is not dissimilar to that of the U.S. missile test program and hints at the deterrent purpose of the Iranian capability.



FIGURE 1: November, 2006 salvo launch of six missiles in Iran
A similar salvo launch of seven missiles was conducted in July of this year.¹⁶

Iran's motive for pursuit of an operational nuclear capability is well established, and frankly, completely rational. This pursuit was dramatically accelerated after Iraq's use of chemical agents on Iranian forces during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war.¹⁷ Iran's logic that possessing this capability would give enemies in future conflicts significant pause before using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against Iran is, arguably, very sound. Indeed, it represents the basic premise of the United States' own policy of deterrence since the end of World War II. In his recent article published in the last issue of the Joint Force Quarterly, Dr. Clark Murdock asserts that nations pursue the development of nuclear weapons for various reasons. "They are seen as the ultimate guarantee of national sovereignty and survival; their possession is believed to confer world-class status; and they can serve as the 'great equalizer' for nations facing competitors with significantly greater conventional military power."¹⁸ All three of these motives apply to Iran. The deterrent effect of nuclear weapons capability would bring Iran a sense of security in a tumultuous region where the U.S. involvement is, in their view, way too close for comfort while providing considerable gravitas among their Islamic peers and around the world. Iran's clearly established and rational motive coupled with strong indications they are moving rapidly in parallel on several fronts (enrichment, design, and delivery capability) to achieve a nuclear capability indicates their determination and sense of urgency with regard to this program.

If Iran is, as these factors indicate, in full pursuit of nuclear weapons, then the next logical question one might ask is "how soon will they have one?" This is the subject of great debate. Unfortunately, much of it is among people or agencies that are pushing for either intervention or non-intervention, and many seem to form their arguments to support their agenda. This debate has served to reduce the probability of future, harsher UN actions,

especially any authorizing force, as some governments point to the longer estimates as arguing for giving current measures more time to work. There does seem to be a convergence of estimates between the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on the subject and that of Israeli experts indicating a capability is possible as soon as late 2009 and somewhat probable in the next six years.¹⁹ A more disturbing report from a nuclear arms watchdog group called The Wisconsin Project lays out a compelling mathematical analysis based on the current known (IAEA reported) status of low enriched uranium stores and centrifuge capacity in Iran. They calculate that by the inauguration of the United States' next President Iran will have sufficient stores of low enriched uranium feedstock to supply a rapid program of further uranium enrichment to weapons grade. This estimate is based solely on declared enrichment capability and does not make any attempt to account for the possible clandestine program discussed in the NIE and by other sources.²⁰ If Iran then announced a pullout from the NPT and began recycling this feedstock through the centrifuge cascades located at Natanz, Iran could possess sufficient highly enriched uranium to produce a weapon within two to three months.²¹ In light of Ahmadinejad's curtailment of access to IAEA monitoring, it is also possible Iran could begin this recycling process between inspections without pulling out of the NPT, and have the recycling go altogether undetected.²² Thus they could elect to announce their nuclear weapon capability (perhaps via weapon test) and withdrawal from the treaty simultaneously at the time and place of their choosing. In one plausible scenario, an announcement might be timed to coincide with national elections scheduled for next spring in Iran.

A belligerent state apparently determined to build nuclear weapon in the near future in an AOR of vital national interest and the ineffectiveness of the non-kinetic instruments of

national power to prevent that eventuality might lead one to conclude that use of military might is the only feasible remaining approach to the Iran problem. The seemingly simplest military option would be to conduct a quick precision air strike on Iran similar to the 1981 Israeli airstrike that destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak before it reached initial operational capability. Unfortunately, Iran appears to have applied lessons learned from this historical example to their program. Their facilities are dispersed, many nodes are hardened, and it is widely believed that there are additional sites that are as yet unknown to the United States.²³ (Figure 2) As such, an air strike in Iran would bear little resemblance to the Osirak strike in Iraq. Rather, an airpower-based operation would need to be very broad in the



FIGURE 2: Known major sites associated with Iran’s nuclear program.²⁴

factors of space, force, and time. Unlike Iraq in 1981, support from Russia has enabled Iran to deploy effective air defenses, especially surrounding known nuclear sites.²⁵ Thus, unlike the Israeli operation in 1981, an air campaign would likely result in the loss of aircraft, prisoners of war, and casualties. Given the hardened and dispersed nature of the known

targets and the likely existence of a number of unknown targets, the probability of an air campaign achieving its objectives is in question. Since Iran has all the technical knowhow to produce the needed material and build a weapon, the best one could hope for in an air attack is a setback in the timetable.²⁶ Such a strike might achieve, at best, a 2-3 year setback in the Iranian program. In discussing this basic approach, Drs. Davis and Perry of The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis and Defense Threat Reduction Agency, respectively, indicated the impact would be minimal unless the U.S. continued the operations over months or years in order to prevent the program from being reconstituted.²⁷ This assessment was echoed in the Bipartisan Policy Center report.²⁸ It is also highly unlikely Iran would simply absorb the strike accepting a setback to their program without reaction, as Iraq did in 1981. Iran would very likely create havoc in Israel's Palestinian areas through their proxies in the area. They may also conduct a counterstrike using their ballistic missile capabilities against Israel and U.S. interests within range of these systems.²⁹ Naval action in the Straits of Hormuz is also quite probable. In short, a U.S. air operation against Iran's nuclear program would not be a quick, clean, decisive engagement.

Given their demonstrated willingness it may be tempting to call on Israel, perhaps covertly, to do the “dirty work” in this situation by mounting Osirak-style air strikes, albeit on a much broader scale. Unfortunately this would only serve to validate Iran’s perceived need for a nuclear weapon to counter Israeli capability while garnering an even more vigorous military response from Iranian forces. It would most certainly yield a more rapid and more negative reaction from Arab states both inside the AOR and all over the world. It would have a galvanizing effect among Arab nations removing opportunities for the U.S. to effectively exploit the seams between these nations in future pursuit of interests in the

CENTCOM AOR and could even garner additional support among these states for Iranian nuclear ambitions or international terrorism. Finally and most dangerously, sustained Israeli action against Iran would run a very real risk of creating conditions that could lead to a broad regional conflict pitting a coalition of Arab states against Israel. If things went badly for Israel, the United States could be drawn into a very broad, regional war in the Middle East. It is very definitely in the best interests of the United States to work hard to keep Israel on the sidelines in this situation. President Bush, in apparent recognition of these risks, recently reportedly denied Israeli requests for U.S. approval of a plan to carry out these strikes.³⁰

In light of the low probability of real success or lasting impact in pursuit of the objective of destroying Iran's nuclear program from the air, an "all in" approach on the ground may be viewed as the surest way to achieve the United States' desired end state. With forces present and logistics support already established on either side of Iran, a ground invasion could follow an even broader air campaign. However, the size and terrain inside Iran would require a protracted ground effort even more massive and enduring than Iraqi Freedom in order to find and destroy all elements of Iran's nuclear program. In their report, Drs. Davis and Perry quoted a CENTCOM planner as saying these factors of space coupled with size of the population in Iran would make Iraq seem like "walk in the park" by comparison.³¹ Although most other states in the region share the concern over a nuclear Iran, they would in all likelihood feel increasing pressure to rally to the cause of a fellow Muslim state as operations were sustained over time, damaging relationships in the CENTCOM AOR. Another protracted and even more difficult war in the oil rich area of the Middle East would likely have broad and very negative impacts to world financial markets. Given the recent global economic crisis, U.S. decision makers as well as leaders across the world are

highly unlikely to be willing to risk such a war at a time when international financial markets are already extremely fragile. Add to this the general climate of war weariness of the American public, political leaders, and the military forces themselves and the probability of this sort of direct intervention in the next several years seems slim. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in speaking before an audience at the U.S. Military Academy described Iran as a nation “hell-bent on acquiring nuclear weapons.” Although he indicated we must keep the military option on the table, he seemed to refer to the war weariness factor saying “another war in the Middle East is the last thing we need.”³² By all appearances, Iranian leaders know this and are betting their futures that the United States is unwilling to go to war to stop them from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis leads to three basic conclusions: Iran appears to be a rational actor in pursuit of national interests and is, therefore, deterrable; it is in pursuit of an indigenous, operational nuclear weapons capability and may be quite close to achieving this objective; and that the instruments of national power have either proven ineffective to stop their progress or are impractical in the current international environment. The net impact of these conclusions is that a nuclear weapons equipped Iran is a near term probability in the CENTCOM AOR.

Despite the occasional apparently irrational rant by Ahmadinejad (probably intended for internal consumption), Iran appears to behave more as a rational state actor than an irrational actor, such as the adversary found in Al-Qaida. Their carefully planned and executed pursuit of nuclear weapon capability is logic-based and indicative of a nation attempting to protect its own vital national security interests and project power. Nuclear

capability would bring them various benefits including a sense of security with regard to perceived belligerent outside powers such as the United States and Israel, and set them apart from their Islamic peer states in the Persian Gulf as the only one with this powerful capability. As a result other nations would in fact be forced to deal with them in a different manner and they know this. Dr. Clark Murdock notes the fact that “to date nuclear weapons have made both possessors and their adversaries much more cautious on embarking on courses that could escalate to nuclear use.”³³ Iran very clearly has a rational motive for pursuing a nuclear weapon. This demonstrated rationality is absolutely key to a deterrent strategy toward a future nuclear armed Iran where “both possessors and their adversaries” proceed with caution in their approach to one another. While a deterrent policy is never comfortable because of the risk, the U.S. appears to be out of viable alternatives. Should deterrence fail, the strength of the international reaction would place some very effective response options back on the table.

Iran has the indigenous capability to produce the required fissile materials and appears to be building and testing the components needed to craft an implosion weapon once adequate material becomes available. On a separate track they have aggressively pursued and now possess the ability to deliver a weapon up to 2000 nautical miles if, in the future, their security interests demanded such action. All Iran needs to bring it all together into an operational capability is time. Over the past five years, Iran’s response to diplomatic, information and economic pressure has ensured these instruments of power had little impact other than buying the Iranians the time they need.

Even before the current financial meltdown, the challenges of conducting an effective military campaign were daunting. The Bipartisan Policy Center report published before the

current global economic crisis began noted “the next administration might feel that the risks of a military strike are outweighed by the transformative dangers of living with a nuclear-armed Iran.”³⁴ This is doubly true in the current economic context. With the clock ticking and any near term military action ill-advised and highly unlikely, a nuclear armed Iran may soon become a new reality in the CENTCOM AOR. While concerned nations can and certainly should continue with the heavy use of non-military instruments of power in the hopes that they will eventually have the desired outcome, as the cliché goes, “hope is not a strategy.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTCOM PLANNERS

The conclusion that a nuclear armed adversary in the Middle East is very possible in the near term means CENTCOM must begin now to consider how this impacts their ability to pursue vital national interests. Planners need to consider the impact of a nuclear armed belligerent in the middle of their AOR on the operational functions they are expected to synchronize. Next, they need to prepare and coordinate a robust information operations campaign aimed at deterring Iran from using nuclear weapons. Finally, a full Operations Plan needs to be created and maintained for rapid implementation in the event deterrence fails.

Several operational functions require reconsideration in light of this probable new planning factor. Many of the command and control systems currently in use throughout the CENTCOM AOR are susceptible to the electromagnetic pulse generated in a nuclear detonation. Nuclear hardened systems like those currently used in the nuclear command and control system (NCCS) will need to be procured and employed throughout CENTCOM to ensure critical nodes are able to maintain command and control in the event of a conflict.

U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) can provide considerable expertise on the current NCCS system and elements or systems that could be employed in CENTCOM's AOR. Operational logistics will become more complex. Planners need to reevaluate the materiel currently maintained in the AOR that is within the range of Iran's nuclear threat. (Figure 3) This may mean leaner logistics near the potential future battle and longer lines of

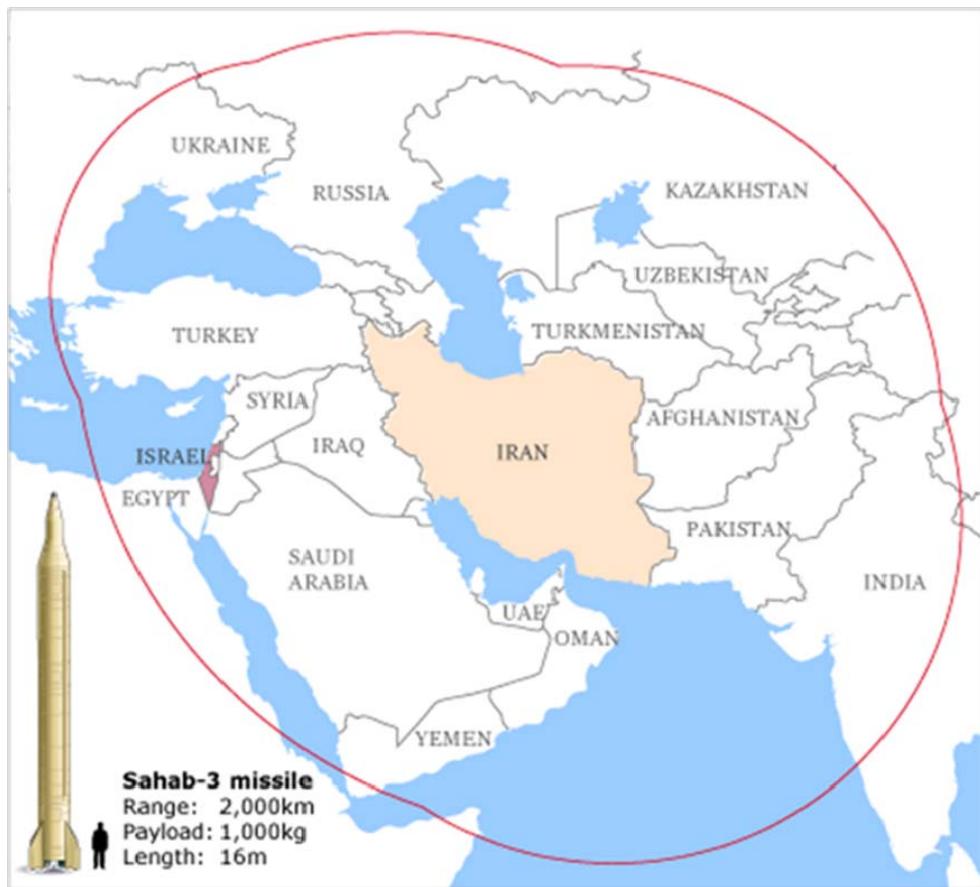


FIGURE 3: The range of newest version of the Shahab-3 depicted by the red line.³⁵

communication with major stores kept safely outside the range of the Shahab-3. The U.S. installation at Diego Garcia provides one potential logistics hub. Operational protection concerns may drive dispersion of troop and equipment concentrations inside the Iranian missile threat ring to minimize the impact of a successful nuclear strike. This would present a new challenge to efforts to mass forces to conduct future operations in the AOR. These bases will require robust missile defenses to provide top cover using systems such as the U.S.

Army's Patriot PAC-3 or Navy's Aegis. As development of missile defense systems continues, new systems will need to be integrated into AOR defenses. Clearly, given the gravity of this threat versus conventional tipped missiles, CENTCOM requires high priority when it comes to these high demand/low density assets. In the event these systems fail, consequence management teams need to be deployed in a manner that enables rapid response. Sufficient fallout shelters will need to be constructed at each operating base and troops in the AOR will need comprehensive training on fallout procedures. The importance of theater ballistic missile warning capabilities developed and deployed to detect and warn of Scud launches during Desert Storm would increase in light of the possible payload of any missile launched from Iran. The support of operational intelligence takes on a new sense of urgency within the CENTCOM AOR. Intelligence assets from the national level down will need to be focused on monitoring Iranian missile forces and assessing intentions. This information will need to be fed into a continuously updated target planning process to maximize the effectiveness of a strike on Iranian nuclear capability.

Information operations will be critical to ensuring effective deterrence is maintained vis-à-vis Iran. CENTCOM planners need to take the lead in preparing and fully coordinating a robust information operations campaign aimed at convincing Iranian leaders the U.S. has the capability and will to respond to any use of nuclear weapons. To avoid sending mixed signals this campaign must not be employed until *after* Iran has announced a capability. The campaign must explicitly articulate that any use *or attempted use* (intercepted by defenses or failed yield) of a nuclear weapon by Iran will bring the same swift and assured destruction to the Iranian forces and government. It must be clearly stated the response can be expected to utilize the full spectrum of U.S. capabilities. It should further clarify that Iran will be held

equally responsible for any nuclear attack carried out by a proxy that can be traced back to Iran through use of nuclear forensics or intelligence sources. A separate campaign should be developed targeting friends and allies in the AOR, especially Israel, in order to provide reassurance of U.S. support in defending them and responding in the event of an attack. In essence, the United States would be extending its “nuclear deterrent umbrella” over allies in the CENTCOM AOR as it did over Japan following World War II. As a part of this information operation campaign the Commander of CENTCOM needs to engage in high-level military to military diplomacy. This effort should be targeted at reassurance but, more importantly, would begin a critical and ongoing dialogue regarding anticipated coalition response in the event of nuclear use by Iran. These discussions would serve to remove some of the ambiguity surrounding what to expect from potential partners in the critical hours and days following any such event.

An important part of effective deterrence is having the capability to respond should it fail. CENTCOM planners need to create a complete OPLAN for swift and decisive victory should Iran use or attempt to use her nuclear capability. Planners will have an unusual luxury in creating this plan in that, unlike most recent military endeavors, the U.S. will enjoy broad based public support at home and abroad in responding to any nation choosing to cross this threshold. This will mean CENTOM will have very few restraints, including planning for the use of nuclear weapons. That said, this plan must contain both a purely conventional and conventional with nuclear use branches. It is possible the President may not be willing to authorize employment of nuclear weapons even following Iran’s use, opting instead to maintain the “moral high ground” in a broad conventional response. Planned nuclear options should include a range of options from very small, demonstration attacks to a broader nuclear

warfighting approach aimed at the destruction of the Islamic Republic. The options should be created using a variety of nuclear delivery systems to ensure the President has flexibility in responding quickly to a very dangerous situation that may still be unfolding. To this end, one option should be planned using the intercontinental ballistic missile force to ensure the most rapid response that destroys Iran's ability to employ any remaining nuclear weapons is available. Because of their detailed knowledge and expertise in the AOR, CENTCOM planners need to lead the planning effort for these nuclear options with USSTRATCOM in support providing weaponeering and nuclear command and control expertise.

Because of the gravity of the situation from which the need to employ this plan would arise, planners need to ensure it is complete and realistically executable in a new environment created in the AOR by a nuclear armed Iran. As such, the operational considerations mentioned above must be taken into account and the plan must be thoroughly tested through detailed, comprehensive war gaming analysis. Once complete, the plan must be continually updated to reflect the latest intelligence data available on the locations of key capabilities related to the Iranian nuclear weapons program. This will ensure the plan is always ready for rapid employment in what would undoubtedly be a chaotic and urgent situation. Because of the devastating power of each of these weapons, once Iran has crossed the nuclear threshold, there will likely be an urgent desire to preempt any further use in the opening minutes or hours of either branch of the response plan.

FINAL REMARKS

The current high priority for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons needs to be maintained by the United States and other nations around the world. The U.S. should continue to aggressively pursue the diplomatic, information, and economic instruments of

power with regard to Iran and any other nations pursuing nuclear capabilities. However, the recent track record indicates a lack of effectiveness with regard to a determined Iran leaving little hope of stopping them from entering the nuclear club without extensive military action. Political and economic realities make this kind of operation highly unlikely. This leaves CENTCOM planners facing a likely new reality in their AOR. The intensity of the rhetoric associated with the ongoing application of international diplomacy and information operations might lead one to believe a nuclear-armed Iran would have an earth-shattering impact on the region. Careful consideration reveals this change, while significant, it does not “change everything” with regard to U.S. policy in the AOR. Nonetheless, to ensure continued U.S. influence in a region of vital national interests CENTCOM planners need to move beyond the rhetoric and begin planning for the probable reality of a nuclear Iran.

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